



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10**

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OFFICE OF
ECOSYSTEMS,
TRIBAL AND PUBLIC
AFFAIRS

April 29, 2013

Slater Turner, District Ranger
Lookout Mountain District
Ochoco National Forest
3160 NE Third Street
Prineville, Oregon 97754

Re: EPA Region 10 comments on the McKay Fuels and Vegetation Management Project DEIS, EPA Project number 12-4150-AFS.

Dear Mr. Turner:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed McKay Fuels and Vegetation Management Project on the Lookout Mountain Ranger District of the Ochoco National Forest in Crook County, Oregon. Our review was conducted in accordance with EPA responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The DEIS analyzes the Forest Service's proposal to strategically reduce forest vegetation density and fuel loadings; increase or maintain large tree structure and hardwood abundance and diversity in riparian habitat conservation areas; and contribute to local and regional economies. Proposed project components include commercial and pre-commercial thinning, juniper removal, mistletoe reduction, controlled burning, and riparian harvest to benefit hardwood species. The project units would be located within a 25,526-acre project area. The DEIS analyzes a no action alternative and three action alternatives. Approximately 10,948 acres would be treated under Alternative 2 (Proposed Action) and approximately 11,712 acres would be treated under Alternative 3. Alternative 3 is identified as the preferred alternative as it responds to issues raised in scoping. In particular, Alternative 3 treats additional acres through commercial thinning and includes additional riparian treatments. It would also improve floodplain connectivity in two locations.

In our February, 2012 scoping comments, we encouraged the Forest to do site-specific analysis of the riparian stands selected for treatment, and suggested that the analysis demonstrate that silvicultural treatments are needed to maintain and accelerate the achievement of site potential riparian conditions. We are pleased to note that the treatments described in Tables 1 and 2 were developed on a unit-by-unit basis, and that site-specific analysis was used to ensure that water temperature, bank stability, and large woody material recruitment zones would be protected.

While we support the approach taken by the Forest, our review of the DEIS identified a few questions and information needs. We believe that addressing these issues will make the Final EIS clearer and more robust.

Vegetation Management Strategy within RHCAs

Page 139 of the DEIS indicates that the Netmap Thermal Load Modeling was used to estimate the no-cut buffer widths along perennial streams needed to maintain an immeasurable change to solar radiation on the stream (<1% change from existing). This is the only time the Netmap methodology is mentioned within the body of the DEIS. There is a reference to additional information in Appendix C; however it appears that Appendix C has not yet been completed. This would be useful information in the context of our review. We encourage the Forest to post Appendix C to the project website, and to notify interested parties of its availability as soon as possible.

Tables 1 and 2 provide useful detail on unit-specific RHCA treatment, however the treatment areas discussed do not extend beyond 125 feet for certain perennial and fish-bearing streams, or beyond 30 feet for certain intermittent streams. Because RHCA boundaries extend up to 300 feet on class 1 and 2 streams, 150 feet on class 3 streams; and 50 feet on class 4 streams, it would be helpful to have detail included on the kinds of treatments that would be pursued outside of the identified treatment zones (to the outer boundary of the RHCA), as well as the objectives for those treatments.

On page 21, there is a series of placeholders (denoted by the letter X) that affect the readability of the DEIS. Of interest to the EPA is the discussion of treatment options for streams that are not accounted for in Table "X". We anticipate that the intention is to refer to Tables 1 and 2. We appreciate the inclusion of project design criteria to cover streams not included in Tables 1 and 2, however it is not clear what methodology was utilized to establish the proposed no cut, canopy reduction, and cut and leave targets. We recommend that the FEIS include a discussion of these targets and how they were derived.

Finally, we appreciate the inclusion of additional information in Appendix A regarding riparian thinning. The discussion on page 299 of pre-commercial thinning provides helpful context (diameter limits, treatment objectives, etc.). We encourage the Forest to expand this discussion to include all other potential management activities within the riparian zone (commercial thinning activities, juniper treatment, mistletoe treatment, etc.).

Comparison of Alternatives

We find that a side-by-side comparison of alternatives according to proposed action (pre-commercial thinning, commercial thinning, juniper removal, road building, etc) is a useful tool for comparing alternatives. The DEIS includes this information, but not in a consolidated table. We encourage the Forest to add a consolidated table to Chapter 2.

We also find that a consolidated table summarizing potential impacts to resources by alternative is a useful way draw comparisons between the alternatives. Doing so can help to sharply define the issues and provide a clear basis for choice among options consistent with 40 CFR 1502.14. We encourage the Forest to add a consolidated table summarizing impacts by alternative in the executive summary.

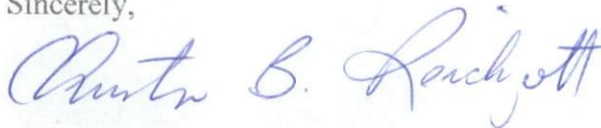
Due to the information gaps identified above, we have assigned a rating of EC-1 (Environmental Concerns – Insufficient Information). As information becomes available (particularly Appendix C) we would appreciate notification.

Overall, the EPA continues to support the objectives of the McKay Project, especially promoting the development of large trees and old structure forest; promoting the development of stream shading where

temperatures are too high; restoring and enhancing hardwood stands as appropriate; and reducing the risk of disturbance events (insect, disease, wildfire) leading to a loss of desired forest conditions.

We appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the DEIS, and we look forward to furthering our understanding of this project. If you have any questions about our review, please contact me at (206) 553-1601, or by electronic mail at reichgott.christine@epa.gov. Or you may contact Teresa Kubo of my staff at 503-326-2859 or by electronic mail at kubo.teresa@epa.gov.

Sincerely,



Christine B. Reichgott, Manager
Environmental Review and Sediment Management Unit

Enclosures

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Rating System for
Draft Environmental Impact Statements
Definitions and Follow-Up Action***

Environmental Impact of the Action

LO – Lack of Objections

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

EC – Environmental Concerns

EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce these impacts.

EO – Environmental Objections

EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no-action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

EU – Environmentally Unsatisfactory

EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

Adequacy of the Impact Statement

Category 1 – Adequate

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis of data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

Category 2 – Insufficient Information

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

Category 3 – Inadequate

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

* From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment, February, 1987.